

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, February 7, 2008

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*Important story at this spot

Father of dead infant jailed on assault charge

By Jason Alley
, The News-Herald

LINCOLN PARK — A man once charged with sexually assaulting and killing his 8-day-old daughter was sentenced yesterday to six months in jail on a separate assault charge.

Christopher Ryan Richardson also was put on probation for two years after pleading guilty to domestic violence against his live-in girlfriend, Cynthia Goscicki.

Richardson, 21, of Lincoln Park, admitted to assaulting Goscicki as the couple took their daughter, Nevaeh, to Henry Ford Wyandotte Hospital on Nov. 23.

"I grabbed her hair and said, 'What the hell did you do to my baby?'" he said.

Nevaeh had blood coming from her mouth and nose when she was admitted to the hospital. Employees noticed additional trauma to the infant's rectum and called police before transferring her to Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit. She died the next day.

An autopsy concluded that the infant had been sexually assaulted and died from massive internal bleeding and sepsis, a blood infection. Before she died, she also suffered bruising to her head and ears, as well as injuries to her genital area. Her right eye also was bloodied.

Prosecutors initially charged Richardson with felony murder, first-degree criminal sexual conduct and first-degree child abuse.

However, 25th District Judge David Bajorek dismissed those charges last month, ruling that prosecutors didn't have enough evidence to proceed with their case.

Prosecutors are appealing that decision, which is expected to take months to complete.

In dismissing the murder charges last month against Richardson, the judge criticized police for the way they investigated and presented their case.

Bajorek said he "would never have signed the complaint and warrant" charging Richardson with the crime in the first place had detectives been clear when they initially testified as to what evidence they had linking Richardson to the crime.

Bajorek said the evidence presented during an earlier court hearing was "much different" from what detectives told him when they convinced him to

sign the arrest warrant in November.

The judge said prosecutors had no physical evidence linking Richardson to the crime. He said that several other people had access to the child during the same time period.

At his court hearing yesterday, Richardson was ordered to undergo counseling, to pay \$1,520 in court costs and to have no contact with Goscicki. He also was forbidden to possess any weapons, alcohol or illegal drugs, and will be forced to undergo random drug testing.

As he has been incarcerated since being charged in December, Richardson was given credit on his 180-day jail sentence for the 74 days he's already served. He is due to come back before the judge July 10 for a final evaluation.

Lora Weingarden, the assistant Wayne County prosecutor who handled the case, said she was comfortable with the sentence. She had asked the judge to give Richardson the "longest term of probation possible."

Richardson seemed much more upbeat at yesterday's court hearing than he has in the past, where at times he has screamed obscenities while vehemently denying having anything to do with assaulting his daughter.

Yesterday, he was smiling and motioning to friends and family in the gallery to call him.

His younger brother, Jacob, broke down in tears during the hearing and had to be consoled by his mother, Adie Green.

Outside of the courthouse, Green said she was happy that her children soon will be reunited.

"I'm glad he's getting out," she said. "Now they need to look at who really did this."

Ray Clair, Richardson's second cousin, has attended his relative's court hearings from the onset and said he still doesn't know what to think.

"I just want closure," he said yesterday. "I just want to know what really happened. There's something really wrong here."

Clair said he and many of his relatives never had a chance to meet Nevaeh.

"That's what's really sad," he said. "Stop and think about that baby. I just want them to find whoever did this. Whoever it was needs to be found."

Contact Staff Writer Jason Alley at jalley@heritage.com or at 1-734-246-0867.

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http://www.thenewsherald.com/stories/020608/loc_20080206004.shtml

Monroe News

Feb 7, 12:11 PM EST

Detroit girl shot while protecting mom is released from hospital

DETROIT (AP) -- A Detroit girl who was shot six times while jumping to her mother's defense has been released from the hospital.

Seven-year-old Alexis Goggins was released on Wednesday and is living with her mother at her grandfather's Detroit-area home.

Police say Seliethia Parker was being threatened at gunpoint on Dec. 2 by a former boyfriend in a sport utility vehicle when her daughter jumped into her arms.

Bullets struck Alexis' right eye, chin and jaw. She now is blind in that eye and had several surgeries before her release.

Parker has said Alexis was trying to save her from the attack.

Calvin Tillie is charged with two counts of assault with intent to commit murder and faces a Feb. 14 competency hearing. The Associated Press left a message Thursday seeking comment from Tillie's court-appointed attorney.

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Chats disgust Standerfer

Grant talked with his sister about being a celebrity, Tara's funeral

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Alicia Standerfer could only listen to about half of the audio recordings between Stephen Grant, her sister's killer, and his sister. But half was enough for her.

"I got to the point where I didn't want to hear his voice anymore," Standerfer said. "I fell asleep on the couch one day listening to it on my iPod. When I woke up to his voice, I tore them off as fast as I could.

"It was the same voice I listened to for 13 years. I don't know how many times I heard him say, 'You don't understand,' and here it is again. ..."

But she also indicated that listening to the conversations at one point became "addicting, like a soap opera" for her and her husband, Erik, because of the many startling remarks.

Standerfer was referring to more than 50 hours of the in-person and telephone recordings officially released to the media Wednesday by the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office. Included in the release was a transcript for about half of the conversations between Grant and Kelly Utykanski from his March arrest through last fall prior to his trial.

Standerfer said she received the recordings in late November, shortly before jury selection started in Grant's murder trial. The recordings were handed over to her attorney, Patrick Simasko, as part of the civil case involving the placement of the children. They became public after the prosecution obtained them for potential evidence in the case. Signs posted at the jail inform people that conversations by inmates are recorded, except those with their attorneys.

Grant, 38, was found guilty of second-degree murder for the Feb. 9, 2007, strangulation of Tara, 34, in their Washington Township home. He is scheduled to be sentenced Feb. 21 by Judge Diane Druzinski in Macomb County Circuit Court. Sentencing guidelines show a recommended minimum term of 18 to 31 years, up to life, but Druzinski could exceed the 31 years if she can provide sufficient reasons.

County Prosecutor Eric Smith plans to play "three or four" excerpts from the conversations in court at the sentencing to try to show the judge Grant's lack of remorse.

In the conversations, Grant and his sister discuss a wide range of topics, including minutia regarding Grant's personal affairs, strategies for Utykanski to win adoption of the two Grant children and media coverage.

Standerfer said she was shocked at the pair's apparent nonchalant attitude.

"It was like they were sitting down and having a cup of coffee," she said. "I don't know if I could do that, if the shoe was on the other foot and I had a sibling" who committed a similar act.

The most offensive talk revolved around Tara's funeral, in which Utykanski makes fun of the type of casket and how Tara's body was arranged inside.

"It's unbelievable that was discussed," Standerfer said.

Standerfer said she was surprised that Utykanski insisted upon attending the funeral in the first place, not asking Standerfer if she could attend. The funeral was held in the Upper Peninsula where Tara and Alicia grew up.

Standerfer also took offense to the comment, "s--- happens," by Utykanski in response to Grant saying he never envisioned his life taking this path.

"You're comparing somebody's murder to, 's--- happens?'" Standerfer said.

In an interview broadcast Monday on WJBK-TV (Channel 2), Utykanski said she talked about the arrangement of Tara's corpse out of "my own curiosity, whether it was respectfully done."

"I was questioning how your body is shrouded and how it is presented in a closed coffin," she told the TV station.

Utykanski in the interview questioned the release of the recordings.

"I don't know if this is another way to lump me into what Stephen did or to try to drag me down and my family down - dragging our names through the mud," Utykanski said. "I have no idea. It was my thought that after we got a settlement with the kids the healing process would begin. Obviously they don't want that to happen, and that's sad for me. I wish that it would."

Utykanski said she hopes she and Standerfer can get along in the future. While Standerfer and her husband, Erik, have adopted the children, Grant's and Utykanski's parents have visitation rights. Utykanski and her husband, Chris, can participate in those visitations.

"Hopefully after the sentencing they can start putting things behind them," she said.

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http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/020708/loc_n2001.shtml



Thursday, February 7, 2008

Boy saves mom from dad's fiery attack

Christine Ferretti / The Detroit News

BROWNSTOWN TOWNSHIP -- It was love scorned in the most gruesome way. Robert Thompson repeatedly told relatives that if he couldn't have his wife, no one could. He meant it.

Teresia Thompson, 31, remained in critical condition Wednesday, but is awake and responding to commands at St. Vincent Medical Center in Toledo. She's cognizant enough to tell police about how she suffered burns to 80 percent to 90 percent of her body after being duct-taped, doused with gasoline and lit on fire Tuesday in her estranged husband's Ford Explorer.

She knows he died in the blaze -- and that she owes her life to her 14-year-old son who pulled her from the flames.

"He was an absolute hero and saved his mother's life after experiencing all that," said Heath Velliquette, a Monroe County sheriff's detective. "If he hadn't done that, she'd absolutely have been dead."

Teresia Thompson is expected to survive. Going into shock after she was pulled from the burning SUV, she was able to tell investigators about how her estranged husband followed through on threats for months to kill her and commit suicide.

Investigators say the couple hadn't lived together for two years, but Robert Thompson's depression began around the holidays when she served him with long-promised divorce papers.

She and her three children, two boys and a girl ages 14, 11 and 9, were living with an uncle in Brownstown Township. She had a job at a Pizza Hut across Interstate 75 in Woodhaven. She was dating another man. She was moving on, Velliquette said.

Her 33-year-old husband wasn't. A carpenter who'd been living in New Orleans and working construction jobs after Hurricane Katrina, Thompson returned to Michigan every other month for visits.

"Family members said he was very distraught and contemplating suicide," Velliquette said. "He made comments to family members that if he's not going to be with her, that no one is. His wife was going to leave him and has been involved with someone else on and off."

Tuesday morning, Thompson picked up his reluctant wife and eldest son at her Brownstown Township townhouse for breakfast, police said. Things went bad quickly, police said.

They began arguing. He assaulted her, taped her up and headed toward his sister's home in Erie Township. With his son in the car, Thompson called his sister, explaining he'd "screwed up" and "was going to end it now," Velliquette said.

Police said Thompson pulled his SUV down a wooded trail about 1,000 feet off the roadway next to his sister's home in the 2100 block of Rauch between Strasburg and Telegraph roads.

He ordered his son out of the vehicle, instructing him to walk away and not to turn around.

But the boy did -- in time to save his mother and watch his father die.

"Shootings or stabbings we've dealt with, but the tragic incident of actually blowing the car up and lighting it on fire -- that's pretty extreme," Velliquette said.

Pizza Hut manager Dan White said the company is planning to give money to Thompson's family for rent and groceries.

"We are doing what we can do for her as an organization. We're even going to ask our customers to help" he said. "This is very sad."

Christine Harget, who lives a few doors down from Teresia Thompson, said she's hopeful that she will pull through.

"I couldn't believe it. I hope she's OK and especially her son," said Harget, 35. "To know someone would do something like that, it's too close."

Mentors for migrant children needed

Grand Haven Tribune

Thu, Feb 7, 2008

The Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance is seeking volunteers interested in being matched with children from area migrant camps.

By introducing community mentors for the migrant children, the program aims to build bridges between the cultural communities and provide these children with new friendships and experiences.

For many migrant children, going to local parks, visiting museums and even swimming at the beaches will be new experiences.

"Mentors give children an opportunity to participate in activities and to visit places that they might not otherwise experience," said Teresa Van Oosterhout, coordinator of the Migrant Mentoring Program.

By providing these types of opportunities, in partnership with the invaluable gift of friendship, mentors help create a sense of community and acceptance for the children and their families.

Ottawa County is the largest employer of migrant farm workers in the state, with 11,900 workers and their family members coming here each year. The county's many fruit and vegetable farms require the large migrant workforce for the planting and harvesting of crops. A large number of workers also come to this area to work in the nursery farm industry.

The migrant families travel from Texas to Michigan each spring and stay until late fall to provide these services. This necessitates that their children must go through the difficult transition of changing schools twice each year. The children begin the school year in the Holland and Grand Haven areas,

only to leave after the fall harvest. They re-enter the Michigan school system in early spring, when the workers return to the northern fields.

In addition to the normal difficulties involved in changing schools, there are several other factors that create barriers for these children.

In most migrant families, English is not the primary language. Although the majority of children are bilingual, many of the parents are limited in their English proficiency. This limitation creates a lack of awareness of community resources and an inability to access them.

In addition, many migrant families lack adequate transportation needed to facilitate their children's social or after-school activities. Simultaneously, migrant workers are often in the fields for long hours each day, limiting the availability to meet the social needs of their children.

The children and their families, as well as the mentors, benefit from the mentoring relationship, officials say. Parents often comment on the unique nature of the Migrant Mentoring Program, and believe it makes this community a more welcoming place. Mentors are likely to report gaining a greater awareness of Ottawa County's diversity and the richness of the migrants' culture.

Each volunteer mentor meets with a child once a week for the duration of the migrant workers' stay — usually late February to late November. Last year, the program served 63 children.

Anyone interested in volunteering as a mentor with the program should contact Van Oosterhout at 846-9074, or by e-mail at teresa@ethnicdiversity.org. Information is also available on the Lakeshore Diversity Alliance's Web site, www.ethnicdiversity.org.

City sets '08 poverty levels

Move enables residents to qualify easier

By Jason Alley
 , The News-Herald

LINCOLN PARK — Low-income homeowners wishing to seek a poverty exemption on their taxes have a better chance of securing one in this city than residents do in some other communities.

The income levels that are used to determine poverty levels under the Michigan General Property Tax Act are typically taken from the federal government.

This year, however, Assessor Tony Fuoco decided to alter the numbers a little, giving residents a better chance of securing a tax break.

"The law states that we can't make the guidelines harder to meet than what the federal poverty guidelines are, but we can make it easier if we choose to," he said.

"When you look at those federal guidelines, they're pretty tough for some people to meet. They're pretty low incomes. I think that a lot more people could use the help. ...

"I think someone can make a little bit more money and still be struggling. I opted to make it a little easier to qualify. This is aimed at helping the people who truly deserve it. They're just trying to make ends meet."

In order to qualify, a one-person household cannot earn more than \$13,300; two-person, \$15,400; three-person, \$18,400; four-person, \$22,500; five-person, \$25,600; six-person, \$28,700; seven-person, \$32,700; and eight-person, \$35,800. For every additional person, add \$3,600.

There are a number of other criteria that must be met as well to qualify. Those who do are eligible for a partial reduction in their taxes up to a full exemption, depending on their individual situations.

Those interested in picking up an application form can do so in the assessor's office inside City Hall, 1355 Southfield. Forms also are available online under the assessor's section of the city's Web site, www.citylp.com.

Forms must be returned by March 4.

For more information, call 1-313-386-1800, ext. 239.

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February 7, 2008

Budget Increases: \$108-\$216 Per Pupil, 4% Revenue Sharing, 3% Higher Ed

K-12 schools would get per pupil increases ranging from \$108 to \$216 and local governments would see a 4 percent increase in the statutory portion of revenue sharing under the \$44.8 billion, \$9.8 billion general fund, budget for 2008-09 recommended Thursday by Governor Jennifer Granholm.

Universities and community colleges would get a 3 percent increase under the executive budget proposal.

The budget provides for \$235 million in lower spending through savings and reforms (as expected \$50 million of that would be with reforms and efficiencies in prison programs), and has \$100 million to deposit in the state's rainy day fund.

Some programs would see the first increase in several years: the revenue sharing boost is the first since 2001 and the governor is recommending a 2 percent increase in the monthly grant in the Family Independence Assistance program, the first since 1990. The annual FIA clothing allowance would be increased to \$75.

The governor is proposing \$1.4 billion in capital outlay spending in the current year and \$250 million in 2008-09 as part of a one-time economic stimulus package.

Other key elements include:

- \$31.5 million in early childhood education
- \$40 million in additional funds for the No Worker Left Behind program which brings total worker training spending in several programs to \$618 million,
- the previously-announced plan to add 100 State Police troopers,
- \$10 million for a nursing corps program and \$4.8 million in nursing scholarships as part of a mission to add 6,300 nurses over five years,

- \$3.35 million for mental health courts to provide treatment to non-violent offenders who would otherwise be sent to jail.

The increases in per pupil spending would raise the minimum per pupil funding level to \$7,420.

The additional funds for universities would be distributed through a formula recognizing factors such as degree completion, enrollment of low-income students and federal research funding. Funding for the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Wayne State University would also include technology and commercialization factors.

The total budget, including fees and federal funds, is about \$1 billion higher than the 2007-08 spending levels, while general fund spending is marginally lower.

DETROIT FREE PRESS

IN OUR OPINION

Ask for smarter priorities in budget

February 7, 2008

It hardly makes sense to pay too much attention to the \$3.1-trillion federal budget proposed by President George W. Bush. With a lame-duck Republican president, the Democratic-controlled Congress is unlikely to adopt it as submitted, and if Bush threatens to veto changes, the result will probably be a continuation of the current budget until the next president takes over.

That also means making sure that the most serious budget issues get aired in the national forum of this year's elections. Nothing can change until voters grasp the scale of the country's long-term money problems and empower their elected leaders to work on them.

Specifically:

- **Health care:** The projected growth of Medicare, and to a lesser extent **Medicaid**, will bring down the budget over the long run if this country doesn't get serious about how to handle its medical needs. (Social Security, by contrast, can continue indefinitely with only a few tweaks.)
- **The national debt:** It basically rises in tandem with Medicare. Follow the long-term trend to the end -- 75 years out -- and interest payments become the biggest single part of the budget.
- **Discretionary spending:** Defense and all the non-entitlement programs the federal government runs get increasingly squeezed as a share of gross domestic product. If you worry that environmental protection, education, inspections and disease monitoring get short shrift now, just wait.

In Bush's very limited effort to bring the budget back to balance over several years, defense programs still get a full green light. Most other programs -- and egregiously, they are mostly **those that help keep the social safety net intact in turbulent times -- are either held steady or cut.** Programs the federal government shares with cities and states are hard hit.

In drawing a trend line toward a balanced budget, Bush somehow manages to ignore several big costs in the near future. Presumably he doesn't believe the United States military will exit both Afghanistan and Iraq within four

years, but his budget implies as much. Nor does his plan fix the alternative minimum tax, which Congress has adjusted year-by-year while dodging the permanent change it needs.

Congress has the wherewithal to revise or ignore the president's recommendations. But the underlying problems -- how to manage health care in this country and how to rein in the national debt -- will not be solved this year. Only vigorous debate in the course of the presidential and congressional elections can take this country toward the major fixes that are so vital to its long-term economic stability.

Michigan shorted

Perhaps the biggest insult to Michigan in the president's budget is his plan to cut a program called **Adult Employment and Training Services**. In a state where retraining and other assistance to job seekers has proved vital, his federal budget proposal would take \$7.4 million away.

Among the other potential cuts in the Bush budget that would hurt Michigan, according to an analysis by the Joint Economic Committee of Congress:

- \$23.9 million in Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants for college students.
- \$7.4 million in grants to police and other crime-fighting agencies.

Many other programs would get slashed or capped in ways that make it difficult to detail the precise damage. But **Michigan can hardly turn the corner on its economic problems if Bush succeeds in paring Medicaid support, housing and heating assistance for low-income Americans, and grants for community assistance and development.**

Oceana's Herald-
Journal

Posted: 2-6-2008

New local DHS director named

Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) Director Ismael Ahmed last week announced the appointment of Larry Boitnott of Otsego as director of the Mason/Oceana County DHS effective Feb. 11.

"Larry has demonstrated significant administrative skills and has extensive experience in assistance payments, contract management and volunteer services," Ahmed said. "I am confident that as director of the dual Mason/Oceana offices he will continue to provide quality leadership."